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by

Travis Austin Maiuro

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**Just Making Some Pizza:  
Writing “Pizza Stoned”**

**APPROVED BY  
SUPERVISING COMMITTEE:**

**Supervisor:**

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Charles Ramírez Berg

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Cindy McCreery

**Just Making Some Pizza:  
Writing “Pizza Stoned”**

**by**

**Travis Austin Maiuro, B.A.**

**Report**

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## **Dedication**

For my Dad



## **Abstract**

### **Just Making Some Pizza: Writing “Pizza Stoned”**

Travis Austin Maiuro, M.F.A.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2016

Supervisor: Charles Ramírez Berg

The following report details the process of writing the feature screenplay *Pizza Stoned*, from genesis of initial idea to early outlines, first draft and rewrite. The report also provides commentary on each stage of the writing process and retrospective reflection.

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## Chapter One – Ain't No Senator's Son: My *Big Fish* Dad

Growing up, my father encouraged me to embrace the hippie. My hair grew until I finally put my foot down and made my mother take me to the hairdresser after one too many strangers couldn't make out my gender. A few years later during middle school, when the *very* faint mustache painting my upper lip made it a bit easier to discern gender (just a bit), I grew the hair back out, much to my dad's delight. By freshman year, it went past my shoulders.

Aside from hair politics, my dad also crafted for me a music education (countless summer road trips blasting The Stones and Dylan and the like; days of sifting through old vinyl to satisfying a craving for just one song by Emerson Lake & Palmer or Blind Faith). There was also a constant reminder that he and I were, in the immortal words of Creedence Clearwater Revival, "no senator's son[s]" and there'd never be a silver spoon for us to benefit from. He was an outlaw—and I was Outlaw Jr., apparently. And as a kid, that's truly how I saw him. He was the only longhaired dad at the little league games, the dad who stood out at back to school night.

This "outsider persona" sprung from the stories of his "hippie days." The older I became, the more I heard about the concerts, friends, and drugs. But there was a Monkey-See, Monkey-Don't-Do irony that attached itself to these stories and this persona, as I came to find out in the middle of my high school career after an "incident." I was called into the Vice Principal's office for allegedly (*definitely*) smoking marijuana "on school grounds" and was facing a week's suspension and a semester's worth of meeting with a counselor. I was not allowed to leave school grounds until a parent picked me up and took me directly to get a drug test. My mom was at work so the only parent available to be my escort was my dad—the self-proclaimed hippie who was once arrested for

possession of marijuana—and he was not happy, to put it lightly. Of course, his reaction was very in-the-heat-of-the-moment but it was hard to take him seriously after hearing all of his heyday stories. *You're one to lecture me on this, dad.*

Long story short, I somehow passed the drug test and was met with no suspension. Eventually the incident became humorous to my family, notably my dad. But the main takeaway was the irony of his initial reaction. Sure, one could argue it was his duty as a father figure to react in such a way but at the same time, it helped shed light on the different sides of my dad, the contradictions. This is why, between my sister and me, my dad is referred to as *Big Fish* Dad, after the father who is fond of telling tall tales in the Tim Burton film of the same name.

This moniker isn't so much claiming my dad's stories are fiction, but rather my dad seems to have many different personal histories, similar to the character in the film. In *Big Fish*, the character of Edward Bloom tells many different stories—all with varying degrees of believability. “Big-Fish stories.” These stories paint him almost as a different character for each tale. Similarly, my dad has his hippie past but he also will play into his Italian-American New Jersey upbringing when convenient. He was born in South Carolina and spent his childhood summers down south, so he also has his “Southern Man” persona, which envisions him as some cross between a cowboy and a one-time member of the Allman Brothers. He can go from Gregg Allman to Frankie Valli to John Lennon in a matter of hours—it's quite the talent, honestly. He's a liberal pacifist who still wants to throw the occasional sucker punch when the time is right.

These different personalities and contradictions were the seeds for a character that I thought would make for an interesting protagonist. And with the plethora of stories my dad readily told, I thought I had enough material with which to work. This realization

produced itself years ago... and only this past year did I finally craft a story out of all that material. Of course, I had to narrow down which “persona” to use.

My dad first began to drift toward the hippie lifestyle while still in the Air Force, actually. Right after graduating high school in 1965, my dad was stationed at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas. From there, it was off to Italy with a bunch of other fresh-from-high-school kids. The job in Italy was vague but it entailed camping out on a mountaintop and “spying.” Tedious work that led to a lot of slacking off. There was a cheap radio with them, which could pick up signals bouncing from London. Here, my dad first got his taste of the song that “would change his life forever.” (He can be a bit dramatic.) It was Procol Harum’s “A Whiter Shade of Pale.” He says listening to that song, up on that cold mountain, military gear on his back, he realized that he was missing out. He was missing out on this movement that was beginning to take shape—a movement he saw his non-military friends beginning to embrace; a movement that the Air Force was holding him back from. Perhaps it was a bit of Buyer’s Remorse—my dad wanting what he knew he now couldn’t have because of his decision to join the Air Force.

However, he found a way to try and balance both worlds the best that he could. During his tenure, he was stationed at Travis Air Force Base, 50 miles inland of San Francisco. This allowed for occasional to frequent jaunts to the Bay, where my dad and a few others would take in the excitement of Haight-Asbury and all that came with it. Like a man coming back from the Gold Rush, he returned to the East Coast with fresh knowledge of the hippie movement—but still tied to the Air Force. In his final stretch of duty, he was stationed at a base close to home and during his days performed his duty for the military and during his nights, explored the growing music, bar, and alternative scene growing across the river in nearby New Hope, Pennsylvania. Towards the end of his Air

Force tenure, he began to wrap his head with a towel, fashioning himself a makeshift turban. “Why?” his superior officers would ask him. “Head injury,” he’d reply, as if that were a sufficient—and more importantly, believable—answer. On the last day of service, according to my dad, the “turban” was removed to reveal hair that had been grown to early-Beatle length (think shaggy bowl-cut). The Man was certainly not going to stop him from growing his hair (see Appendix A).

My dad has great stories, no doubt about it. In the larger context, however, they’re all just disconnected *scenes* rather than links of a cohesive drama. Factor in the different aforementioned personalities (hippie, Jersey boy, southern man) and these stories hardly seem to feature the same character. I realized that I could use that to my benefit. I latched on to his days as a hippie, but I could use his different guises to create a conflicted character that seemed to be, whether he knew it or not, more in love with the *idea* of being a hippie, than actually being one. A guy who couldn’t hide from his Italian-American roots. After this conclusion, my issue became, in a sense, becoming more Italian.

I am only a quarter Italian and my dad is half. With a surname like mine—with more vowels than consonants, having to correct people on its pronunciation from as far back as I can remember (for the record it’s My-Your-Oh)—one would think I grew up with the full Italian-American experience. Not so much. We’re not Catholic, our family is hardly huge and bustling, nobody’s in the mob (as far as I know). Basically, we’re far from the stereotypical Italian-American family, shouting at each other from across the table, portrayed in countless films. We have our own weird little version of what it means to be an Italian-American (and German and Irish and Scottish and whatever else is in our blood) family. And I thought that quasi-Italian-ness, that mish-mash of what it means to be a certain type of family would be interesting to explore on the page—but at the same

time, I still needed that classic Italian-American family to fall back on. After all, this was to be a movie about a family pizzeria. So what could I do? Well, there's always using your imagination. And I did that—to a certain extent. The rest had to be stolen—or borrowed—from families that we're just, let's say, better at “being Italian.”

## Chapter Two – Be (More) Italian

On the wall of the small central New Jersey pizzeria Papa's Tomato Pies, is an aged, black and white photo of the current owner, Nick Azzaro, as a five-year-old kid. Chubby chipmunk cheeks and wide eyes gazing a bit stupefied at the camera, he is pictured using a small wooden spoon to paint sauce onto a smooth disc of dough. Papa's Tomato Pies began in 1912, in the Chambersburg section of Trenton—a small, Italian-American pocket nestled in the city. Its 1912 inception makes it the second oldest pizzeria in America after Lombardi's in Little Italy, Manhattan. (Though, if you ask Papa's, *they* are the oldest, as Lombardi's closed for ten years and Papa's has run continuously. This rivalry between the two pizzerias is very real and very much still alive.) Giuseppe Papa was the man behind it all, and in the 1960s, his daughter, Teresa, and son-in-law, Dominik Azzaro, took over operations. The aforementioned Nick Azzaro is the grandson of Giuseppe.

Growing crime and a trend that saw many Italian families moving out of Trenton sent Papa's to a safer town nearby in 2013—101 years after it first set up shop. Nick still works at the pizzeria, but now his job mostly entails wandering around the place, greeting customers and chatting with regulars, making sure the Sinatra or Andrea Bocelli DVD is playing without any technical difficulties on the TV. Once in a while, he'll make his way into the back to make a few pies—perhaps in the opening hours or when it's particularly busy. But mainly, he just seems to be the mascot of the place. He wears a white chef's shirt with these black and white striped pants, his hair trying to emulate Einstein's in whiteness and craziness.

My family frequented Papa's before I got the idea for my script, but we were hardly regulars. Papa's wasn't in the town I grew up in and the town I grew up in had



about ten different pizza spots to choose from—which is quite the feat given that the size of the town is only roughly ten square miles. Pizza places, clearly, were not difficult to come by, which made going to Papa’s relatively unnecessary. We had our own places, our hometown heroes, our local favorites.

Pizza in Jersey—and particularly Trenton—is an institution. We take it seriously and we resent being considered New York’s little brother when it comes to a good slice. I’ll go on the record and say Jersey does it better—while we’re on the subject, our bagels are better, too! Anyway, pizza is huge here. And in Trenton, it’s not just pizza. It’s a *tomato pie*, as the name of Papa’s restaurant reveals. A tomato pie is not a pie with tomatoes inside. We’re still talking about pizza here—it’s just prepared differently. Papa’s pies, for instance, are cheese first, sauce second. And the cheese is generally lighter than your typical plain pie (see Appendix B). It’s similar in style to a Neapolitan Margherita pizza found at artisanal pizza restaurants. But where Neapolitan pies are generally single serving, Papa’s is sized for the whole family. For me, not being a huge fan of cheese (I mentioned I’m not a typical Italian, right?), the tomato pie is perfect. It also feels lighter to eat—more refreshing.

But that’s enough about personal taste. Tasty pizza aside, Papa’s more importantly gave me the creative spark that I needed. It was exciting to take this local legend and use him as a springboard for my own character. The Papa’s Tomato Pie history just seemed so classic, so ready to be told that I couldn’t resist. But of course, I needed to make enough changes to the details to make it my own.

The subject and history of Papa’s was brought up when the script idea was first pitched in Richard Lewis’s Advanced Screenwriting class in the Fall of 2015. I included articles from NPR and *The New York Times* that documented the history (and rivalry with Lombardi’s in New York) of Papa’s. I intended to make the fact that, in Trenton,

pizzas aren't just pizzas but rather Tomato Pies central to the story. With this, I was met with my first of many obstacles. Granted, this was a small one, relatively speaking, but it still caused an issue. The term *tomato pie* caused confusion for some. I had to explain that tomato pies are not dessert pies, they *are* pizza, but different. "Different how?" Less cheese, more sauce. "Like Chicago pizza?" No. Not at all.

If explaining tomato pie was going to be this difficult in person, I didn't want to bother taking up space on the script page by trying to break it down in story. I decided to just call it pizza in the script and the decision to let go would be a preview of things to come for the writing process. Pizza versus tomato pie seems a little trivial in comparison to some of the other things I had to let go of. Much more important things like character development and plot movements became issues that I needed to ruminate on altering to make for a smoother writing of the first draft.

### **Chapter Three – Learning to Let Go (Of That California Dream)**

In the original pitch to the class on the first day, I hawked a movie idea that had my protagonist, Nick Berra, trying to move his father's New Jersey pizzeria out to San Francisco. The logline I came up with was, "A clueless hippie tries to open a pizzeria in San Francisco in memory of his pizza-making father, bringing the family along with him." I pitched a B-Story featuring the love interest, Sarah. Similar to what would be in the eventual first draft, Sarah's goal was to be a chef, but in this pitch, she was from the Bay Area—Walnut Creek, specifically. Her character would set up food stands at food festivals in San Francisco and Berkeley. At a festival, Nick would try her food, love the taste of what she was cooking up, and persuade her to work at the pizzeria. Together, they would introduce Jersey-style pizza to the hippie masses of San Francisco. Needless to say, these ideas didn't stick.

The reaction to the premise was generally positive. People were into the core idea of a hippie and a pizzeria. But there were issues, big ones, ready to be picked apart. The biggest note I received came from Richard Lewis: why am I allowing Nick go back to San Francisco? What was the point? He felt that it just seemed to overcomplicate things—and he was right. He reminded me—and the class—that we need to make life difficult for our protagonists. By taking the pizzeria back to San Francisco, Nick essentially gets what he wants—he's back in California. It doesn't matter if the restaurant succeeds or fails because Nick's where he wants to be; he achieves his goal of being part of California and the hippie movement. The movie would have essentially been over by the end of proposed Act One. Things need to be shitty for your protagonist—and what would be shittier for Nick than having to *stay* in New Jersey? The light bulb went off—it made perfect sense. It made perfect sense but I was still hesitant to make the change—but

that's writing, eh? I was set on this idea of New Jersey Italian-Americans introducing tomato pies to the hippies of San Francisco. I was set on the idea of writing a movie *set* in San Francisco. But Richard was right; I realized I was forcing it.

In a way, I had to echo my protagonist—I, like Nick, needed to let go of my California dream as he does in the script. In this new version, Nick would realize living on the east coast, the place he ran away from and wanted to avoid so desperately, wasn't so bad—it all just depended on the company you kept. But now I needed a reason to keep Nick there post-Act One. I revised my ideas and then pitched an outline in the following weeks (see Appendix C). Fortunately, among my dad's many stories, I was able to scrape up a real-life reason. My dad was drafted while he was stationed at Travis Air Force Base. He had to go to Vietnam. He weighed his options. Canada suddenly looked good. He put his head together with his younger brother, who was attending Rutgers at the time. They were able to find a loophole. My dad applied for a provision that would allow him to avoid Vietnam in order to stay home to take care of a sick family member. Two weeks later, my dad got word that he was able to work 9-5 at a nearby base in New Jersey and commute from home, while taking care of his mother.

I figured I would apply this to the movie. In this first outline draft, Nick was in the Air Force, stationed at Travis Air Force Base, like my dad. Nick's father would die and while he was home for the funeral, he would get his draft notice (*very* coincidental, I know, the majority of the class made sure I knew and in retrospect, writing it out, I realize just how cheap that would have been). He'd use the taking-care-of-mom provision as an excuse, but that would mean he would have to work at the pizzeria to legitimately take care of her. It might have had its flaws but the important thing to me at the time was I had a reason for him to be stuck back in New Jersey.

But bringing in the military and the draft came with consequences. Most of the class, Richard Lewis included, didn't mind Nick finding a way out of the draft. But there was some feedback that wasn't really comfortable with the plotline. In the outline, the way Nick manages to succeed in getting out of it is kind of played for laughs—I had two options: have Rose pretend to be sick or use a wheelchair-bound great-aunt to pretend to be Rose. It would be a set piece for the movie, with everyone playing a role. The problem for some was the use of comedy when dealing with what was essentially dodging the draft. As the conflict in Vietnam was so heinous and so violent and so many people *weren't* able to escape it, the humor just didn't translate for a select few. They couldn't get past it. I disagreed. One, I thought enough time had gone by that it wouldn't be in poor taste to have the moment played for humor. And two, I wasn't entirely making this up, as my dad did what he had to do to get out of a stupid conflict, though not as zanyly.

Eventually, though, I resigned and took out the entire plotline. It served as too much of a distraction and I couldn't really find a way to write around it. That wasn't the only screwball aspect of the outline, though. The outline had the entire movie turning into something fairly different from what it would eventually become. For some reason, I was simultaneously trying to make the movie about Nick overcoming the death of his dad, learning how to grieve while veering off into whacky directions. The zany bits came in the form of the pizzeria turning into a makeshift commune for nearby hippies that Nick's girlfriend Dream would scrounge up. Nick would get so caught up in the hippie lifestyle that the pizzeria would suffer because of it and Sarah and his mom would have to give him a reality check.

Looking back, Sarah didn't seem to have as much of a presence as she should have, making the romance between her and Nick difficult to buy. It also didn't help that Nick came off very unlikable. Emotion in relation to the father's death is something I've

struggled with even in rewrites, but it was pretty much non-existent here in this outline. There's a moment where I had Nick in the empty pizzeria and a regular comes to the door soon after the death of Angelo, who would become Dominic (more on that later). The customer tells Nick that Angelo would've wanted the place open, wouldn't want people to mourn. He'd want people to eat pizza in his honor—that kind of thing. Nick says, "Good for Angelo." And then closes the door on the customer. If that's not a jerk-move, I don't know what is.

As mentioned above, Angelo was the initial name given to the father character. (Angelo was my grandfather's name, so I was intending a little homage.) And the pizzeria was called "Pop's Pizzeria" instead of "Dominic's Pizza," which it would turn into once writing commenced. This came from a Richard-note, advising me that father and son should have the same name, give them that connection. And the name on the restaurant should be after the father, so Nick has this constant reminder, this ghost literally hovering above his head. I really liked that idea, even if it meant giving up the Angelo connection (which I would find a way to incorporate in draft two).

Looking back at the outline, it's easy to forget just how many things change once writing begins (and the benefit of having a weekly/bi-weekly workshop to provide feedback). But one of the bigger changes to stand out and that cannot go unmentioned is the plot movement of Dream getting pregnant. I can remember that the Coen brothers' *Inside Llewyn Davis* heavily inspired that whole plotline and characters' reactions to it. Someone had brought the movie up when I first pitched the idea; perhaps because of the time period and in pitch form, the tone of the piece wasn't exactly clear. To be honest, at the time, I wasn't even sure what I wanted the tone to be. I had seen *Llewyn* two times but hadn't read the script so I took a look at it and was struck by the Coens' minimalism.

Not just in their stage direction and dialogue, but even in their story as a whole. Things seemed so simple, so uncomplicated.

I kind of took that minimalism and ran with it, but in the wrong ways. I should have known this from the start, as I've tried this with other writers and filmmakers, with the same result every time—it doesn't work: only the Coen brothers can be the Coen brothers. Trying to play into their style was hurting me overall because, when I was just writing naturally, unconscious of trying to write like them, my own style would rear its head and ultimately clash with the forced Coen style I was trying to write.

The pregnancy plot was inspired by the pregnancy of Carey Mulligan's character in *Inside Llewyn Davis*. Dream was to announce her pregnancy at the midpoint—but not know who the father was. It might have worked had I not tried to handle it the same way the Coen's did. There was this detachment to the way they handled theirs, a bit of a dark humor underlying the moment. When I tried to do the same in the outline—have Nick respond with one-word answers and then a biting line at the end—it just came off unemotional.

Needless to say, I scrapped the pregnancy storyline. It was less because of it being difficult to write and more to do with the fact that it would overtake the rest of the story. Suddenly, the movie would be about a baby. Also, Nick's reaction to the pregnancy didn't help his already wavering likability.

As mentioned earlier, the biggest thing suffering in this outline stage—other than Nick's likability—was the Nick/Sarah romantic relationship. As this, in my eyes, was to be the crux of the script (after all, I was classifying this as a *romantic comedy*), I needed to make sure that this dynamic worked. In order to do that, I needed to do my research.

## Chapter Four – Dough + Cheese + Sauce = Romantic Comedy?

I had two initial inspirations for the script when I first pitched the idea: *Big Night* and *Ratatouille*. Clearly, I was looking at movies about food, rather than romantic comedies. Sure, it could be argued that both films *are* love stories; they're love stories between chef and food. Sure, both also possess a love story between brothers (*Big Night*) and two friends, one a human and one a rat (*Ratatouille*), but at the core, they're movies about the love of cooking. So these scripts would help me in the kitchen, so to speak, but not in the bedroom, if you catch my drift.

For the real romance, I needed to look elsewhere. I needed to look at the romantic comedy classics—or so I thought. I stumbled upon the 2007 movie *No Reservations* starring Catherine Zeta-Jones and Aaron Eckhart. Technically, I didn't "stumble upon" it as I remember it coming out when I was in high school but at the time had no interest in it. Rediscovering it, the premise seemed to fit my own idea well—romantic tension in the kitchen. There's also a deeper, more emotional storyline involving the Catherine Zeta-Jones character taking in the daughter of her best friend who has just recently died.

I also looked at *When Harry Met Sally...*, which actually didn't come into play until after the writing process started. It hadn't crossed my mind beforehand, as my script and that script don't necessarily have that much in common. But I rewatched it one night while I was just starting to write the first draft and was still figuring out my ending at the time. *When Harry Met Sally...* is one of my favorite movies, primarily because of that how-can-you-not-love-it ending. And rewatching it, falling in love again with Harry's run through the city, his arriving during the New Year's Eve countdown, Sally's proclamation of "hating" him, makes me smile every time. I wanted my own version of



this. And as a whole, I wanted to tap into the Act One bickering between Sally and Harry and infuse it into Sarah and Nick.

One of the biggest takeaways from the romantic-comedy watching was the importance of the “meet-cute.” Richard’s big note was I needed a better one. And I went back and tried to spice it up—but I think my main problem was spicing it up *too* much. It was a bit overdone; *forced* would be a good word for it. But at least it was something because the first “meet-cute” (if you can even call it that) was pretty much nonexistent. See Appendix D, but to paraphrase, the first writing was simply Sarah and Nick meeting at the funeral reception and Nick being a bit stupefied by her. According to Richard, this “stupefied” Nick was a problem as it seemed like Nick was fawning over Sarah while Dream was right there in front of him. More points against Nick—even if I wasn’t trying to write it that way. The second iteration was a bit more in line with screwball comedies of old. It may have worked if the rest of the script’s tone was just as gimmicky. It was also *way* too long. Though, like I said, at least it was something.

*Big Night*, however, probably had the biggest influence on my script out of all the films. A story of family, struggling to keep an Italian restaurant alive-- in New Jersey, no less—felt very familiar. Personally, the model films I choose are for specific aspects of my script—one may be for structure, one for tone, and one may be simply to note character. (In fact, Richard had me look at *Moonstruck* solely to see how the Italian-American characters interacted as family.) When it came to *Big Night*, I was using the film to cover all bases.

Stanley Tucci and Tony Shalhoub play Italian immigrant brothers—the Tucci character, Secondo, being the more levelheaded of the two, spends the majority of his time in the main part of the restaurant, interacting with the guests. The Shalhoub character, Primo, is the hardheaded chef, unwilling to Americanize his food, even if it

means the restaurant goes under. A scene early in the film features a belligerent couple unimpressed with their food. Secondo deals with the matter, gently trying to explain that this is how risotto is properly served. The woman doesn't seem to care—she asks if she can at least get a side of spaghetti or something? Secondo, fearing his brother's reaction to this blasphemous request, does his best to dissuade her, telling her that spaghetti and risotto aren't supposed to go together. The woman just isn't getting it. Secondo, with heavy reluctance, has to venture into the kitchen to relay the request to his brother, knowing the reaction that's to follow. Needless to say, it isn't pretty. The scene is humorous but also so well crafted in handling the struggles of the restaurant as well as the dynamic between the brothers and their respective dynamics with the country in which they're now living.

If I could tap in to just a slice of that all too real chemistry, I knew I would be on the right track. Getting ready to write, I still didn't have the best reason for Nick to stay in New Jersey (and to be honest, I wouldn't for the entire first draft, in my opinion). Because of this, I overcompensated when it came to the antagonist of the script. So one of the main things I tried to pay attention to was the way *Big Night* presented and created its antagonist—a rival restaurateur named Pascal played by Ian Holm.

It's this Ian Holm character that really gives *Big Night* a plot—after Secondo once again turns down Pascal's offer of the brothers coming to work for him, Pascal tells Secondo he can do him a favor; a last hurrah to try and bring business to the restaurant. He'll invite his friend, famous singer Louis Prima, to come eat at the brothers' place, invite a bunch of people—make it into a big party. One big night. He seems authentic enough, but there's always a bit of shadiness about him that creates a hint of unease. But for the most part, we're with him—the film is very straightforward, not gimmicky with tension or anything.

I latched on to the idea of a rival restaurateur, creating the character of Russ Plumeri. For the first draft, my weak reason for keep Nick in New Jersey was simply his inheriting of the pizzeria. In order to get out from under it, Nick would be intent on selling it. Enter Plumeri. I had Plumeri (for reasons that weren't really explained) buying up a bunch of real estate in the town and turning it into parking lots. Nick would note this and Dream would encourage him to try and sell the place to Plumeri. The idea definitely had some kinks in it and it was something I had to do a lot of smoothing out of during the first draft writing—and it never really fully smoothed itself.

I tried to view *Big Night* with a romantic-comedy eye and struggled. There are romantic plotlines, featuring both brothers, but they were neither central enough (Primo's) nor happy enough (Secondo's). So, in a sense, for the romantic comedy aspect, I had to just apply what I knew. Conventional rom-com wisdom—whatever that means. I knew I needed friction between Sarah and Nick but not so heated that it would be unbelievable once they got together. I needed to give Sarah her own goals. I needed them, as a potential couple, to have both highs and lows. I needed to find a way to make the love triangle work. I dabbled in all of it and some things worked, some things didn't. A note I kept hearing regarding this aspect dealt with Nick's likability: the love triangle wasn't working. This was frustrating for me because I couldn't tell if I just wasn't figuring it out or if some people were just being overly sensitive—they kept saying Nick comes off as an ass for juggling both women like that. I kept thinking: haven't you all seen any romantic-comedy ever? This is a thing! A very overdone thing! But they had a point and it was mainly just my frustration making *me* sensitive. Either way, the notes were refreshing because it only meant one thing: I was finally starting to actually write the thing.

## **Chapter Five – Finally Making the Pie: Writing That First Draft**

I felt good about the first chunk of pages I handed in for workshop. Writing them felt natural and the dialogue between Nick and his mom and sisters seemed to just roll for me. The feedback I received was fairly positive, as well. By year two, the majority of the cohort and I began to realize that the nitpick-ier the feedback, the better shape the script. Of course, I took all notes into account and saved them for later. But I kept on writing.

It didn't remain such smooth sailing—which is great, because I needed the constructive criticism. It all would be beneficial. As mentioned above, the love triangle caused some issues. One of the primary reasons was because Dream was coming off very likable for many people, if not their favorite character. While definitely not the worst problem to have, it proved cumbersome because of the negative effect it had on Nick.

The initial characterization of Dream was admittedly the easy way out. She was basically your run-of-the-mill, kooky and somewhat air-headed hippie-dippie girl. However fun it was to write, and apparently read, it wasn't the most original of characterizations. She really shined in those opening pages, as she traveled with Nick to New Jersey and was introduced to a world she knew nothing about. Moments featuring Dream at her most ditzy were the favorite of many. These same moments, however, would be changed later on as I received further notes once the draft was completed. The consensus was that Dream came off too dumb. I didn't want her to be dumb. In a number of ways, dumb translated to sympathetic. There was no way around it: the way Dream was characterized, Nick couldn't win the fight for likability. No one was going to side with Nick on leaving Dream for Sarah.

But that didn't stop me from continuing to try to push it. In stubborn writer mode, I was adamant that this love triangle could work, citing the countless love triangles in

countless romantic comedies. What I didn't realize was there was a formula that those other love triangles (at least the successful ones) followed. Or perhaps I realized this but was immune to applying it to my own script. At least for a while. Finally, I started to look into it when I was thick in the writing process.

I looked at *Sweet Home Alabama* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. *Sweet Home Alabama*, while maybe not the best of movies, was at least a good example for me as there were a few similarities. A woman returns to her hometown and starts to not only fall for her former flame, but also fall back in love with the place she grew up. The love triangle consisted of Reese Witherspoon's character, the well-to-do fiancé she was leaving behind in New York City, and the rugged Southern boy/former flame.

For *Bridget Jones's Diary*, Bridget Jones is stuck in between nice guy Colin Firth and her boss Hugh Grant. In this movie, it helps that Hugh Grant's character is pretty much a jerky sleaze-ball at the end of the day. Which, of course, as mentioned already, is what I was missing. I didn't have a clear villain in this love triangle I set up—except for maybe Nick, which was definitely not good.

But in *Sweet Home Alabama*, the “villain” is less clear. There is no Hugh Grant character, really. We're not led to despise either of the romantic choices for Reese Witherspoon's character. So how does she remain likable? I knew it had to be more than just Reese's charm as an actress. Despite the movie not being a success with critics, it was a fairly big hit with audiences and that meant it had to have an ending the people responded well to. In other words, there had to be an ending that allowed audiences to be happy with the protagonist.

Reese's character is torn between the two and doesn't want to hurt anyone. Nick, to his credit, shared the same sentiment when it came to Sarah and Dream. But perhaps Nick came off as playing the two for too long or too much. Reese's character also seems

to learn something about herself—come to terms with her flaws. I had to think; maybe it wasn't clear enough that Nick was learning anything from this experience.

It was a frustrating process. So frustrating that I looked to “The O.C.” Yes, I was desperate enough to figure out this love triangle that I turned to early-2000's teen soaps. I grew up with “The O.C.” and remembered the first season love triangle featuring Seth Cohen and Summer and Anna.

Not only did “The O.C.” example feature the male character in the middle like my script, but both love interests were incredibly likable—no one was easily portrayed as the “villain.” If anyone was the villain, it was Seth for not making a decision soon enough—sort of like my issue with Nick. Granted, comparing “The O.C.” and my movie was a bit difficult as “The O.C.” had the benefit of half a season to develop each character's relationship and personality. There were arcs where a fling with Summer ended and one with Anna began to which Summer would become jealous and insert herself back in. I didn't have the time to be able to play with something like that in my feature script constraints. So I looked at how Seth handled the situation, getting right to the bottom of it.

Ultimately, Seth “chooses” neither girl. He admits that after stupidly playing them both, he doesn't deserve either one and doesn't want to hurt either one. Of course, neither wants to “be his friend” and neither is happy with his decision. It's a lose-lose situation for Seth, but a win for the way he is perceived by audiences. Now we are sympathetic for him. I decided this was the way to go for Nick. He would have to let Dream go be Dream on the West Coast, accept that it wasn't meant to be for them, he was holding her back. And he couldn't be the reason Sarah didn't follow her dreams of being a chef.

Eventually, in the next episode of “The O.C.,” Anna makes a decision—she chooses that she *does* want Seth. Seth wins in the end. After Nick apologizes to Sarah, he

leaves. But then she shows up at the pizzeria. Waiting for him. All is forgiven and they finally kiss.

If only it were that easy. I was writing to the place where I wanted to be, but the events leading up to it didn't mesh enough for most people. The issues were more than just Nick and his likability and the love triangle. This pie wasn't ready to come out of the oven, if you will.

## Chapter Six – No Pie is Perfect: A List of Issues

Two thirds into writing the script, it was clear I had three major issues and it would remain that way until the next draft. Nick's likability, the love triangle, and the antagonist, Plumeri—these were the problems I was facing and they all went hand in hand, in a way; one led into the other.

If this were a Venn diagram, Nick's likability would be in the center, with Plumeri and the love triangle on the sides, bleeding into the middle circle. The way Nick handled the love triangle would affect his likability and the way he handled Plumeri and the sale of the restaurant would affect his likability.

There were minor issues that were brought up, too—particularly the family dynamics, Nick's relationship with his sisters and mother. That, too, would be addressed with a fine eye in the next draft, along with this Venn diagram of issues. One of the more pressing issues, though, other than the love triangle, was how I was dealing with Russ Plumeri and selling of the pizzeria. It was a bit of a mess. In the same script, I had Plumeri coming to a hesitant Nick about selling and Nick going to hesitant Plumeri about selling. How I managed to do get myself there, I don't know, but it was clear that it made no sense. I believe a lot had to do with the process of receiving notes *while* writing, every other week. I'd be changing plot movements in the future pages, without going back and changing them in the previous pages, thinking I'd go back to it at the end. Unfortunately, after so many weeks, you forget what your intentions were and it stays a mess.

Initially, I had Nick inviting Plumeri, who was only known as this real estate guy who was buying up the block, over to the pizzeria early one morning before it opened to discuss the possible sale of the place. And Plumeri saunters in and mentions that with the pizzeria, he'd own the whole block. Plumeri then promises Nick that with the money,



he'd be able to take care of his mother. And then Plumeri, in effect, disappears for a while. He's mentioned by characters here and there, but doesn't physically make an appearance. The most prominently he's talked about is around page 45, which I believe I was fashioning as some sort of midpoint, in which Nick proposes an idea to Sarah: he wants to put food items that used to be on the menu *back* on the menu for his sister's engagement party, saying Plumeri will be there and when he gets a taste of everything they have to offer—and the Nick trails off, catching himself. And Sarah wants him to finish his thought and Nick's like, "If he gets a taste of what we have to offer I'm sure he'll give us the loan that we need."

Looking back on it and writing it out now, I have no idea where I was going with this movement. I assume I planned on, as I was writing, incorporating Nick telling everyone that Plumeri was interested in helping the family out with a loan of some sort... But even that doesn't make much sense. Clearly, it was a mess and needed fine-tuning.

As the script progressed, Plumeri turned into this business hawk, being portrayed as hunting Nick down, who was now avoiding him because he didn't know how to get out of the sale. This wasn't working either, since it was Nick's idea to begin with and there was never a moment where Nick addresses his change of heart. Additionally, to further confuse things, I tried to tweak things and incorporate Plumeri giving Nick an ultimatum: if he could prove that he was a good businessman, Plumeri would consider buying the place. What Nick being a good businessman had to do with that, I don't know. I had created a problem—and I was failing to solve it.

Needless to say, Plumeri's storyline was at the top of my Issue List. As mentioned earlier, this storyline line did no favors to Nick's likability. Not just because it was confusing but because Nick seemed to be selling the pizzeria with no remorse. Sure, I tried to introduce Nick having second thoughts, once he started falling for Sarah—but

that wasn't a good enough reason. The reason had to be for the love of family. *For* his family.

Going along with that, it probably didn't come across like Nick really believed in selling it. I had Dream kind of pushing him into it (as an attempt to make her a bit less likable) but Nick's motivations were only out of selfishness and laziness. That would have been fine if there was something else attached to it—belief that he was doing the right thing. I never really hit that and I think that's why it was such an issue. Nick could be doing it for selfish reasons, of course (how else could he change as a character if not?) but he also had to believe that he was doing this *for* his family. I didn't successfully capture that.

Family dynamics in general were also on the list of issues. I wrote earlier that one of Richard's notes was to look at *Moonstruck* for the way the Italian-American family is handled. Despite doing this, there was so much other stuff that I was focusing on (like the Plumeri stuff and Sarah romance) that the family was lost in the shuffle. In the back of my mind, I knew I would have to go back to it. Specifically, Richard's note wanted to see the sisters constantly giving Nick shit—good-naturedly but also negatively. He wanted to see them pissed, at least the oldest sister, Carla, over Nick getting the pizzeria simply because he was the male. This was something to address in the next draft, along with just making the sisters have more of an impact on Nick's life.

The other big issue, which may not seem that big, was the title. Throughout the writing of the first draft (as well as the second draft) I was restless with the title I chose. To be honest, the title I was using—*Hippie Pizza*—kind of fell into place simply because I would refer to the movie as “this hippie-pizza movie.” I bounced around many titles before I even began writing. I went through many songs of the late 60's, looking for titles I could use or tweak to relate to pizza. The problem with tweaking them, though, was

they would come off too “punny.” For instance, say I wanted to use “Gimme Shelter.” But change it to “Gimme Pizza.” Now that’s just a bad pizza. Or “All You Need is Love” changed to “All You Need is Pizza.” Not going to work, sorry.

*Hippie Pizza* was the least cringe-worthy for me at the time. It was a play on Dominic’s Pizza, the location in the film and it could be taken as a play on *Mystic Pizza*. But I was still restless and knew that, eventually, this would be something I needed to address.

## **Chapter Seven – Bad First Slice: Reexamining Act One**

I had my list of issues, yes, but more importantly, I had a finished first draft. And it would hide away for a few months until my thesis committee, Charles Ramírez Berg and Cindy McCreery, would take a look at it in April of 2016. I would get to see if the list of issues I doctored up for myself would match up with the notes of Charles and Cindy.

For the most part they did, but also, it became clear that I, as a writer, was being a bit hard on myself—a bit nitpicky. But that’s always going to happen. The big takeaways were Dream’s characterization (too ditzy, too flighty, too stereotypical) and slowing down the grieving process. I agreed completely, particularly with the grieving note, as it fell in line with the issues I knew were present with the emotion of the film.

I was curious, though, about the handling of the Plumeri storyline. Their response was short and sweet and what I needed to here: just simplify. They didn’t see it as big of an issue as I did. For them, and I think for me (although I didn’t realize it), the movie was truly about father and son.

So I began to outline a new draft, based on the notes and all of the thoughts that came out of the months of letting the script rest out of sight. It was starting off the same way, same opening scenes and beats. I was addressing specific notes, making Dream more down to earth but also more aggressive. It was going to be Dream pushing Nick into decisions he didn’t want to make. I was focusing on having Nick more affected by his father’s death. I had Act One, version two written. But I was frustrated. It felt stale. Boring. I couldn’t figure out why I was unhappy with it. There was only one thing to do—I erased my white board that had my outline scrawled across it and I started from scratch.

I had a new opening image that came out of nowhere but energized me a great deal. This new image also sped the story up. Instead of starting the story in San Francisco, Nick and Dream would already be on their way to New Jersey. I had this image of them in the back of a farmer's pick-up truck, long hair blowing in the wind. They'd be sharing the ride with a goat. The truck would be entering New Jersey, passing the sights of Nick's old stomping grounds, finally dropping them off in front of Nick's childhood home.

It was a jumpstart to the story even though I was killing Dominic off later than the original draft. I had to wait because Nick and Dream wouldn't be hitching a ride for something as urgent and sudden as a funeral. So they'd be coming home for Sofia's wedding, allowing them to hitchhike-- a much more hippie way to travel. I never felt comfortable with Nick and Dream taking an airplane back to New Jersey, even if it did provide some opportunity for funny contrast/visuals.

This change provided me with two things that would help me craft this story. One, I was able to give Nick and his father a moment together. A brief moment, sure, but a moment nonetheless. It's brevity made it imperative that I not waste it and do everything I could with it; I had to hit the right emotional beats. The original draft never had that. Nick learns of the news while still out in San Francisco. In the first draft, he gets a call from his mom. In the next draft that I started over on after the first act, I had Sofia coming out to San Francisco with the news of dad's death and to drag Nick back home.

The second thing the change provided me with was a better way to structure the movie. I really gravitated to this idea of a movie that played with marriage and death. And with Julia being pregnant, which was there in the first draft as well, I thought, you know what? She should *have* the baby. Birth, death, and marriage. Covering all the bases,

pretty much. But this was more than just Act One—I was officially diving into the rest of the rewrite.

Staying in Act One, though, I still had the lingering issues of the “meet-cute” between Nick and Sarah and, more pressing, how to have Nick stay in New Jersey. For the new “meet-cute,” I wanted to simply but also have it not so simple that it wasn’t memorable. I needed to find the balance between slapsticky and natural. I was happy with the outcome, using the stress of the wedding to create conflict and confrontation between Nick and Sarah. But she’d be good-natured and witty the whole time, having the upper hand on the stressed out Nick in the moment. (See Appendix E.)

I found my solution for Nick staying in New Jersey while working with my dad, painting someone’s deck. Painting can get pretty monotonous, especially for a deck of a certain size—stories make the day go by faster. I was in the middle of writing and plotting out my movie during this time, so I would ask my dad about some of his hippie stories. Many I had already heard but some new ones surfaced, making me think that this movie could totally be a TV show—there’s so much material.

Anyway, he was going into detail about a story I already knew. That time he got arrested for marijuana possession. I asked him what became of that incident, what happened to him. And he said it ended up not being that big of a deal, really. He was put on probation and had to meet with a probation officer for a period of time. And it clicked for me—there we go. I had to, in a sense, *chain* Nick to New Jersey, to the pizzeria by getting him arrested. This would also allow me the benefit of a ticking clock with Nick counting down the days until he was off probation and could escape back to California.

This movement also introduced two new characters. The first was Angelo (see, my grandfather’s name found a way back into the script), who was introduced on the first page of the rewrite as a cop but also a regular for Dominic’s Pizza, sitting down with

Angelo to drink wine and eat. This was a nice set-up and payoff, as it would be Angelo that deals with Nick when he's caught with weed. He knows the family and does what he can to help but also, his hands are tied, and can only do so much. So Angelo wasn't a superfluous character. The other new character was Nick's probation officer, Jack Gilbert, who would be used kind of as therapy by Nick, but whose impact wouldn't really be felt until Act Two.

## Chapter Eight – Ready For Seconds: The Rewrite

I used the events of the funeral, wedding, and birth to plot out the movie. Each plot point would coincide with one of the three. The inciting incident of Dominic dying occurs during Sofia's wedding. The midpoint coincides with Dominic's funeral. And around the climax, we have Sofia's second attempt at a wedding *and* Julia's water breaking.

For me, there was something really appealing about having a movie boasting a wedding, funeral, and birth. These things are all part of life and I think it makes the film stronger; it makes Nick stronger as a character to go through these events with his family. On a technical level, it also helped me in the structure department, giving me something to write toward other than an emotional beat. As I said, I'd have a plot point coincide, so, for example, Dom's funeral at the midpoint, around the same time, Plumeri would put his offer in on the pizzeria and Nick and Sarah would share their first (drunk) kiss, after Dom's funeral.

The new character Jack Gilbert, Nick's probation officer and temporary anchor to New Jersey, was inspired by the Robin Williams character in *Good Will Hunting*. I considered making Jack a female P.O., to continue having Nick being surrounded by women and how that shapes him, but it ended up making more sense to have Jack as a stand-in for Nick's father, in this vulnerable time. I still think there is more to pull from the Nick-Jack dynamic, more emotion hidden there but I also feel it serves its purpose for the time being.

I focused on making Nick's childhood friends more present and essential. In the early drift, Nick reunites with his friend Petey but Petey kind of fades away. He was there to show that Nick had truly changed—Petey was what Nick would look like had he not



left for the west. But other than that, Petey really had no purpose, which is why he faded away. In this rewrite, I made an effort to amplify Petey and brought in another friend, Vince. Nick and Dream would be introducing Petey and Vince to weed, and then he would get caught. Vince would really enjoy the weed and keep hanging around Dream, raising Nick's suspicions, bringing the un-hippie-like Jersey boy out of him. So Vince and Petey both served purposes now and Vince would go even further and help me deal with the issue of Dream's likability (and when to get rid of her). Vince would be the tool to bring Dream's free-love sensibilities to light. And Nick, never being able to fully embrace the hippie life, wouldn't be able to deal with it and the relationship would blow up—right before Dom's funeral at the midpoint. So now I had three major movements around the midpoint area—Dream and Nick breaking up, Plumeri approaching Nick with an offer to buy, and Nick and Sarah kissing.

Earlier I mentioned that for the rewrite, one of my goals was to simplify the Plumeri storyline. And I feel confident that I accomplished that. In the earlier incarnations of Plumeri, there was this is-he-bad or isn't-he-bad kind of thing surrounding his character. For this draft, there was no vagueness surrounding his character. He was a businessman that could provide assistance to the Berra family. End of story. The uneasiness surrounding him would stem from *Nick*. Nick's guilt over leaving this pizzeria that had been with the family for his entire life. Selling this pizzeria would create a lot of uncertainties for the characters and that was something Nick had to think about. How would this decision affect his sisters, his mom, and Sarah? Focusing on Nick's guilt rather than portraying Plumeri as this cardboard cutout, mustache-twirling villain was much more real and makes a lot of sense. Nick was already dealing with some guilt, grieving for his father—it would be natural for him to feel guilty about this, as well.

## Chapter Nine – The Chef’s Playlist: Music *and* Movies

Earlier, I mentioned some of the model movies I used before writing. But now I was stuck. What better way to get unstuck than to recharge my “inspiration list?” And what better movie to take inspiration from than *The Godfather*? Granted, my script and *The Godfather* don’t have much in common. Sure, the Italian family crosses over into both, but after reading that first draft, *The Godfather* would be far from people’s minds on a list of similar movies. But hey, can’t find a much better movie to take inspiration from.

Actually breaking *The Godfather* down, though, revealed that there indeed were more similarities than I thought. Son coming home, taking over the family business, etc. I also had potential for a wedding in my script and *The Godfather* famously begins on a wedding day. That first act of *The Godfather* is brilliantly structured, really forcing Michael into a hole he can’t get out of, launching us into the rest of the movie. But one of my favorite parts of that beginning is subtler than the plot movements that find Michael getting involved with the family business. It’s the family dynamic, particularly Vito’s relationship with Michael.

It’s clear from the beginning that Vito views Michael differently than his other children. Perhaps he sees more of himself in Michael than the rest, or perhaps its because Michael was able to get out, get away from the family business and for that, he’s immensely proud. The way Vito looks out of the window and spots Michael arriving has always stuck with me. So I found a way to do something similar.

Now that I was beginning the script with Sofia’s wedding, I had my opportunity to do something similar to *The Godfather*. I even have a moment in which Dominic is

upstairs getting dressed, looking out the window as Nick arrives, a clear homage to Vito Corleone.

I was still using *Big Night* as a reference but it was a new addition that really helped and that was *Good Will Hunting*. I was using Robin Williams' character, Sean, as inspiration for the probation officer, though the relationship between Nick and him would be less personal and sentimental than that of Will Hunting's and Sean's. But it helped clarify things for me and help me space out scenes in the pizzeria. It also helped me express what Nick was feeling easier. In the first draft, he was able to do that with Dream but after changing Dream's personality, Nick couldn't find solace in her. He had to look elsewhere. In this draft, he'd find it in a place he didn't even want to be.

I mention above in the chapter title that music was also part of this list. In fact, it was a large part. I had made a playlist up way back when I first started outlining this idea. After a while though, those same songs would just bring me back to the first draft. So I needed new songs to open up new paths. Luckily for me, I had my dad to help. Song recommendations galore.

The song that really inspired this second draft was "Had to Cry Today" by Blind Faith. Hearing this, I could clearly see this opening image that so inspired me to write—the opening guitar riff of Clapton playing over the images of this long haired guy with this free spirit girl, sitting in the back of a farm truck with a goat. Blind Faith led to listening to Traffic and particularly their song, "John Barleycorn (Must Die)." Then there was "Lucky Man" by Emerson Lake & Palmer. That song was the backdrop for my funeral for Dominic scene. In the bigger picture, maybe this soundtrack I put together is inconsequential, but it's always important to me, no matter what I'm writing. It helps me to picture things visually and it's also inspiring—I like to think of it actually in action,

with the songs playing over the soundtrack. A long shot, sure, but hey—why else are we doing this?

## Chapter Ten – The Chef’s Lament: Final Thoughts

As you never truly stop rewriting, I know these “final thoughts” aren’t necessarily final. Essentially, these final thoughts are where I see this script going from here—what the next steps are. It’s definitely daunting and exhausting to think that there’s still a long way to go but it’s also exciting. It’s exciting when I think about how much more satisfied I am with this draft, after the changes I made. And it only took a moment to just sit down and really think about what story I wanted to tell and what I wanted people to take away from it.

Looking ahead, I have general ideas that I’d like to focus on and in a more nitpicky sense, specific things. I’m still going through different titles, not sure if I’m settled on *Pizza Stoned*. On a broader level, taking Cindy’s and Charles’ second round of notes into account, I’m focusing on refining character emotion and, based on my own diagnosis, I’d like to make the women in Nick’s life more central.

The emotion is going to be a difficult one for me. One of my faults, admittedly, is that I tend to avoid it. I suppose I’m afraid of the balance—the fine line between coming off too unemotional and detached and coming off too melodramatic and hokey. I’m looking at how other movies handle grief and also taking into account that we all deal with grief differently. I think one of the issues my script has is everyone seems to be dealing with it the same way—with humor. And too much humor comes off as no one really being affected by Dominic’s death. I have an image of Rose and Nick sitting on the couch together, breaking down. I think that image will say a lot.

Having the women more central to Nick is an important one because surrounding him with women was intentional and not just a gimmick. More than just offering a visual contrast, I wanted him to learn from them, appreciate them and I think I can do more to

have that come across. I also want to bring out Nick occasionally feeling alienated by being the only man, using that to my benefit.

I haven't really gone into detail about how the endings changed between the two drafts. This is also something I want to focus on as I keep tweaking and writing because, even though I'm happy with the new ending for the second draft, more can be done to flesh out Sarah's thoughts and emotions on the outcome. The first ending was heavy on the *When Harry Met Sally*, with Nick running back to the pizzeria in epic romantic fashion and finding Sarah already waiting there for him, for their big climactic kiss. The second draft ending went in a different direction. (See Appendix F.)

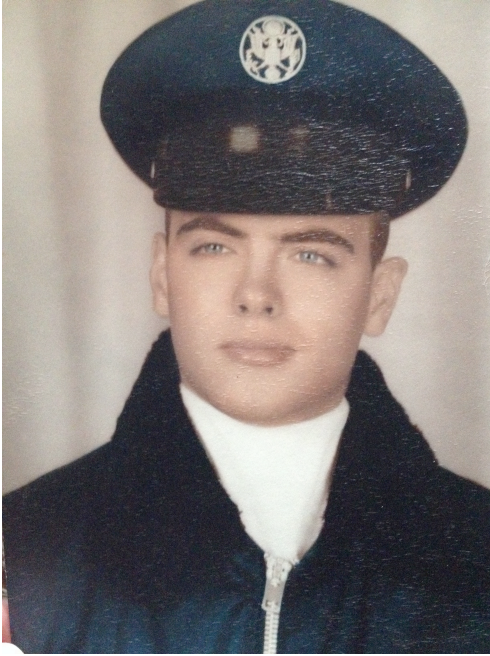
The second draft ending was much more subtle and, in my opinion, more realistic. The first draft also had a little peak into the future, which always carries the risk of coming off a bit hokey. We cut to Sarah and Nick making pizza together. Alternatively, in draft two, after Nick has his final meeting with Jack, he arrives at Sarah's house as she's leaving for New York City. He gets in her car, offering to keep her company on the drive up. There's another climactic kiss, but less hokey in my opinion. Adding to the less hokey-ness is probably the ambiguity of the ending. We see Nick go off with Sarah, but we still don't know what his future holds, unlike the coda of the first draft, featuring him making pizza. Everything is up in the air, as a result of him being back home, essentially. He's brought about change, and he's changed along with it.

I think that sums up the second draft pretty well—subtler and less hokey. And with that, I think it leaves a more lasting impression. It's funny—I seem to always find my writing going off into big and broad directions. The three features I wrote during my time at UT were fairly broad/conventional comedies. The first draft of *Pizza Stoned*, then known as *Hippie Pizza*, was the most low-key of the three but still had its conventional and somewhat broad/slapsticky moments. I always feared it ran the risk of coming off too

juvenile, which was a question I posed in that class taught by Richard but was assured it didn't.

My two years in the MFA program at UT were a very rewarding experience and I'm not sure I would have been able to complete this without being here. I think I was able to tone this draft down even though I didn't have the benefit of seven to twelve voices offering advice along the way because, some of those voices are, if not permanently, then for the next foreseeable future, stuck in my head. As I write now, I hear some of my cohort, my professors, encouraging me to go down one particular road over the other. For me, the biggest benefit of the program was knowing people would actually be reading this, as I was writing it. Personally, it changed the way I wrote and still write, even without seeing them everyday. I did a good deal of writing before coming to grad school, but a lot of the stuff never really saw the light of day other than by my eyes. Knowing people are going to be reading, let alone discussing it in front of you, keeps you on guard. Now I continue that mindset, knowing full well I won't be seeing them the coming Wednesday or Thursday or whenever. I do it because that's the main thing I want to take away from the experience of UT. The different personalities and voices I met. Sure, not all advice was considered as thoroughly as other advice, but you take what you can get. And I'm really grateful that I got it.

## Appendix A – Dad



My Dad, San Antonio, TX – 1965



My Dad, Who knows where, a few years later



## Appendix B – Papa’s Tomato Pies



Nick Azzaro, owner of Papa’s Tomato Pies, holding an “Old Fashioned Tomato Pie,” on which more sauce is favored over cheese.

## Appendix C – Initial Outline

### UNTITLED HIPPIE PIZZA MOVIE - 9/8/2015

*A hippie takes over his father's pizzeria in order to stay out of Vietnam.*

#### THE WORLD OF THE STORY

The story begins in the **San Francisco Bay Area** and then moves to **Trenton, New Jersey. DECEMBER 1969 - JANUARY 1970.** We're in the thick of the Vietnam War, dudes are getting drafted left and right, Nixon's been in office for almost a year. (Shit happens.) -The epicenter of hippie culture, San Francisco, particularly **Haight-Ashbury**: colorful, wild, foggy, dirty, beautiful.

-Trenton, NJ. The **Chambersburg neighborhood of Trenton**, to be specific. It's a pocket of Italian Americans, serving up tomato pies, bread, desserts, haircuts, booze-you name it-for an entire community of Joe Pesci's and Mrs. Joe Pesci's. Trenton present-day is pretty shitty but the **Trenton of '69/'70-think Brooklyn-lite.**

And in Trenton, it's not simply pizza. It's tomato pie. Make sure you get it right.

#### THE CHARACTERS

**NICK BERRA (24)** - Our protagonist is a young man caught between two worlds-the Italian American culture of his past and the hippie culture he is drawn to... (i.e. Caught between Frank Sinatra and "Flowers in Your Hair.") Man, he's just so conflicted, man. His goal will be to carry on the family pizzeria, despite having no prior interest in it, as a way to defer going to Vietnam, which he's been protesting against while living in the Bay Area. This pizzeria goal is out of selfishness, obviously, and guilt (the relationship with his father was strained). Nick must come to terms with the loss of his father and the relationship they had.

**SARAH OBERST (22)** - Her goal is to become a chef. Like a big time chef. She's saving up for culinary school, been working at Pop's Pizzeria for a year now. And she's damn good at it. She's too focused on her cooking career to worry about love. But uh-oh, Nick seems interested in her. And is she falling for him? All she knows is that she's a huge Cream/Eric Clapton fan and if you squint, Nick kinda sorta looks like

Clapton. Kinda.

**MOM (ROSE BERRA) (46)** - One tough cookie. She ran the cash register when Nick's father was alive, and still does from time to time. She's a tiny ball of sarcasm, full of love, and willing to let Nick make his mistakes and learn from them.

**DREAM (20)** - Nick's hippie girlfriend who goes by the oh so mystic name of Dream. She can be a total nightmare. HA-HA. (Rose thinks this is such a clever joke and is quick to point it out. Good one, Rose. But yes, we eventually agree.)

\*\*\*\* ACT ONE \*\*\*\*

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - MORNING

As credits roll, we witness the elaborate making of pizza. One pie after another. Dough gets tossed into the air, again and again-but eventually, it isn't caught. The disc of dough plops on the floor, next to the unmoving body of the PIZZA-MAKER, lying out of frame...

EXT. SAN FRANCISCO - MORNING - DAY

NICK is immersed in hippie life with his gf, DREAM: sunrise and weed at Buena Vista Park; streets of Haight-Ashbury, protesting the war.

INT. HIPPIE HOUSE - DAY

In a Victorian converted to house a bunch of hippies, Nick gets a phone call from his mom. Your dad is dead.

(Nick tries to get out of going, citing no money. She doesn't want to hear it.)

ROSE - "It's your father, for Christ's sake."

EXT./INT. BERRA HOME - TRENTON, NJ - MORNING

Back in NJ, as a fish out of what used to be familiar water, Nick arrives home, accompanied by Dream and their cat, CHER, that Nick found in Berkeley-hugs his mom, ROSE.

They prepare for the funeral.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Nick and Rose go over Angelo's (Dad's) will with lawyer, BOB PITONIAK. (Few years older than Nick, grew up together... Small city problems-everyone knows everyone.) Pizzeria is in Nick's name now... Angelo wrote it off to Nick while he was still alive so it stayed in the family.

Nick's confused-why is it in his name now? He never showed interest in it. Rose is a bit confused, too, to be honest. Nick doesn't want it,

refuses to leave San Francisco.

Rose asks if they can have some time to talk about it. Bob says 2 days is all I can give you.

**\*\*\* INCITING INCIDENT \*\*\***

INT. BERRA HOME - DAY Rose sorts through mail, stuff for Nick.

NICK - "I'm still getting mail here?"

Of course he is; he has no other real address.

DRAFT NOTICE is among the mail for Nick. Shit. He doesn't let his mom know about it.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

Nick talks the draft notice over with Dream; Dream tries to convince him they move to Canada. Nick isn't so receptive to that idea.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - EVENING

Nick alone in the closed pizzeria, looking at photos on wall of himself as a child with Angelo... Lost in thought...

A customer tries to enter the restaurant, breaking Nick's reverie, banging on the locked door. It's a regular customer, claiming Angelo would've wanted the place open.

NICK - "Good for Angelo."

REGULAR CUSTOMER - "Who are you?"

NICK - "I'm his son."

Closes the door.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Nick goes to see Bob the lawyer, with draft notice. Nick has decided to take over the business. But here's the thing-needs to be sure that it will get him out of going to Vietnam. Bob backtracks, says that's not going to work.

NICK - "Can't you make it work?" Any loopholes, pull any strings? Bob says no.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - LATER

Bob walks to his car, Nick gets in, with a bag of grass.

NICK - "Grew it myself."

Bob doesn't "use marijuana" so Nick persuades him to sell it instead;

Christmas is coming, buy your kids more toys.

NICK - "Be a good dad."

Nick pleads.

NICK - "I can't go to Vietnam, Bob."

Bob gives in, can pull strings to make it so Nick is "staying home to take care of sick mother, file her as a dependent."

Bob remarks on Nick's salesman-like pitch.

BOB - "You make for one strange hippie, you know that?"

\*\*\*\* ACT TWO \*\*\*\*

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - DAY

Rose introduces Nick to the CREW-small crew: a DELIVERY GUY, WAITRESS, and HOSTESS/CASHIER when Rose doesn't do it. In comes SARAH, running late... Hmm. Nick intrigued.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - LATER

Pizzeria officially open again for business. And it's busy. Nick in kitchen, trying to learn art of tomato pie from Sarah, having fun.

Rose works the register, other crew members do their thing. It's a madhouse but it has a flow to it. Chaotic organization.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

One customer remains, end of long day. Dream enters with a couple of HIPPIES, friends of friends...

DREAM - "This is Jim."

JIM - "Hey, man. I'm Jim."

NICK - "Hi, Jim." (to Dream) "Who's Jim?"

Etc., Etc... Nick's a bit exhausted, to say the least, annoying Dream. Nick leaves with them, Sarah watching him go, he turns back to say bye.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - DAY

Nick starts to add his personal hippie touch to the place: e.g. OVER his father's Yankees banner, he hangs a Rolling Stones or Jefferson Airplane flag; he takes down a signed portrait of Sinatra and replaces it with a poster for the Monterey Pop Festival; he changes the music in jukebox-sparks more bonding between Nick and Sarah: talk about music and Cream/Clapton.

EXT. NEW HOPE/LAMBERTVILLE BRIDGE - NIGHT

Nick and Dream with new east coast hippie friends. They ask Nick if he's hiring. "We're hard workers, man."

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - DAY

Hippies on the job, sticking out like sore thumbs in this quintessential Italian pizzeria.

Hippies from Pennsylvania and surrounding areas start to frequent the place; regular customers intimidated.

EXT./INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

BURGER BITS (Chambersburg Guys born and raised, looking like fucking Frankie Avalon in "Grease") start a tussle with some hippies outside of the pizzeria; Nick intervenes.

One of the Burger Bits recognizes Nick from the old days; Nick gives them some slices on the house... This is the first time Nick takes a step outside of himself and sees the contrast→ the dislike between the regular customers and their new hippie workers/patrons.

But Nick's sure he can bring about peace, man.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT (CHRISTMAS EVE)

Tomato pie before Xmas Eve church service is an institution in itself... So it's been a long night. But now it's time to close up. Only Nick, Rose, and Sarah remain.

Nick lets Sarah go home and take it easy, bids her a Merry Xmas and all that.

Nick's got an early Xmas present for his mom (TBD). They dance to Darlene Love's "Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)" coming from the radio.

Rose starts talking about Nick's father, memories, reveal a bit more about their relationship... Nick stops dancing, not really wanting to get into all of that.

Dream enters. Can we talk?

**\*\*\* MIDPOINT \*\*\***

EXT. POP'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT Nick locks up for the night, Rose driving home on her own.

Dream tells Nick that she's pregnant... but she's not sure if it's his. Nick flips out (very un-mellow/hippie-like, which Dream is keen to point out).

Their fight continues:

INT. NICK'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Where Dream is packed up, ready to go back home to parents; hopefully figure stuff out there.

NICK - "Take the cat."

DREAM - I don't want the cat.

NICK - I got the cat for you.

DREAM - I never wanted the cat. You take the cat. Dream walks out of the door.

DREAM - I'll call you.

NICK Seriously? You never wanted the cat?

EXT. SARAH'S FAMILY HOUSE - NIGHT

Nick, mind all over the place, goes to Sarah's. She's watching "It's A Wonderful Life" with her fam, all cozy.

Nick meets and greets the parents, wishes them a Merry Xmas-her dad is a jolly drunk, oblivious; her mother is suspicious of this Long-Haired Freaky Person.

They go up to Sarah's room. Nick kisses Sarah. Sarah kisses back. It's nice. Nick wants more. Sarah doesn't. Nick argues, and then leaves in a huff.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - MORNING

Post-Xmas. Nick's alone in the pizzeria, opening up. Looks like he's resenting being there. A bunch of hippies show up, new hippies. Dream said that they'd be safe to crash here for a few days. Said it was a "Haven." Nick's annoyed at first. But then thinks.

NICK - Do you have any Quaaludes?

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - LATER

Other workers arriving to find these hippies chilling in the kitchen; in comes Sarah. Nick apologizes to her for the other night. She's not fully forgiving, just tries to get to work.

INT./EXT. POP'S PIZZERIA - DAY (NEXT DAY)

More hippies fill the place; it's become a MAKESHIFT COMMUNE. And Nick seems to be embracing it... or at least not minding it. He likes being able to please them.

But it's impossible to work with the crowded-ness and the constant haze of weed, and the workers are passive- aggressively letting it be known.

And now the customers are complaining. Rose enters the scene; she's not putting up with this shit.

Rose has taken Nick outside, giving him a what the hell are you doing speech.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

Wishing he was in SF, or really anywhere but here, Nick seeks refuge in this makeshift commune in the pizzeria for the night.

EXT./INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - MORNING

A HEALTH INSPECTOR knocks on the door... clipboard in hand.

Nick tumbles out of the pile of hippies, looking worse for wear. He greets the Inspector who makes his way inside, explaining he's there after receiving a number of customer complaints. Nick's shirtless; the inspector gives him a look. Nick throws on a vest... still essentially shirtless.

Health Inspector notes the kitchen and the hippies and orders the place to be closed until further notice.

Workers show up just as the Health Inspector is leaving, see Nick with the hippies. They learn of the Inspector's decision. Off with the aprons-they quit. Sarah last to do so, but with just as much finality.

INT. BERRA HOME - EVENING

Nick and Rose. Quiet. Nick confesses to being an idiot. Rose agrees. They talk. Rose lets Nick vent and talk sense into himself. The convo turns to Angelo, and Nick finally opens up about his relationship with dad.

Nick tells her about the draft notice; tells her without this restaurant, he's probably going to Vietnam.

ROSE - Well, I'm not letting you go to Vietnam. I'm also not letting you destroy your father's restaurant. Fix this.

Nick reminds her there would be no restaurant without her. Give yourself some credit, mom.

NICK - It's your pizzeria, too, mom.

The cat scratches herself up against Nick's leg. He picks her up, holding her like a baby.

**\*\*\* ACT THREE \*\*\***

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - DAY

Nick barges back in; the hippies are still bumming it in the back. Nick sees one of the hippies using his dad's Yankees flag as a blanket. Nick flips out, takes the flag and kicks them all out.

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - LATER



A phone call. Nick answers. It's Dream.

DREAM - I'm not gonna get fixed. I'm gonna keep it.

NICK - Okay.

DREAM - And I'm gonna stay out here. With my parents for now.

Etc., Etc.

NICK Okay.

DREAM So... how are things?

NICK Just... when it comes out, be sure to let me know if it looks like me or the other guy.

(something along those lines...)

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT → MORNING

Nick's been working all day, cleaning the place up.

It's looking great; like it did when Nick first got there. The cat hangs out with Nick, watching him, glad she's not the one doing all the work.

Nick's in the kitchen, staring down the tomato pie ingredients. He puts Cream's "I Feel Free" on the jukebox. Takes one last hit from his joint. And he's off, finally making a tomato pie on his own.

EXT. SARAH'S FAMILY HOUSE - DAY

Nick's at Sarah's front door, holding a pizza box. Inside is the pie he made-it's the Quasimodo of tomato pies, but it tastes good.

NICK I need you back. The pizzeria needs you back.

Even wants her to think about running it with him. But she turns that down; culinary school. But she's back to cook.

**\*\*\* CLIMAX \*\*\***

INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - NIGHT

The regular crew is back in position. Sarah's working away; everyone's waiting on the Health Inspector. He shows up; inspects the place, as Inspectors do.

Can't see anything unsatisfactory. Except for Nick... looks him up and down. The long hair. The clothes. The facial hair.

Sarah comes out with a pie, fresh out the oven.

SARAH Don't want you making your final grade on an empty stomach.

NICK Guarantee it's the best you'll ever eat.

The Inspector begrudgingly sits down to eat after more pressure... His decision up in the air...

EXT./INT. POP'S PIZZERIA - DAY

A passing grade on the window of the place, the pizzeria is back open for business.

It's got both dad's and Nick's touch. The Yanks are back on the wall, Sinatra's back up there, grinning next to Mick and Keith. There's even a Cream poster on the wall... So Sarah's touch, too. Nick's making it work.

Nick's got Rose there, everything's all good. Outside, the sign has been changed. It now reads:

**MOM AND POP'S PIZZERIA**

#### THEME

The film, to me, is to be a mix of coming-of-age story and an overcoming grief story. I want to explore themes of home, family, roots. Trying to change yourself to move on with your life, but never really escaping where you're from and who you were. Realizing that you can't really escape your past; learning how to embrace where you're from, as it is what makes you, you. Staying true to yourself.

We all deal with grief in our own ways, and I think the way Nick is forced to confront it is interesting and also authentic to his character.

## Appendix D – Two Iterations of “Meet Cute”

### The First “Meet-Cute” Iteration:

Nick’s attention is caught by the young woman hugging Rose. She wears an apron around her waist and her arms are covered in flour dust. Her dirty blonde hair is pulled up and her green eyes seem to know what you’re thinking.

This is SARAH (22). And Nick’s intrigued.

NICK – Who’s this, mom?

Sarah puts her hand out to shake. Nick grasps it.

SARAH – Hi. I’m Sarah. I’m so sorry about your dad. We’re gonna miss him.

NICK – Thanks... can I ask why you’re covered in flour...?

SARAH – Someone’s gotta make the pizzas, right?

ROSE – Sarah’s been a pizza-maker here for half a year now.

NICK – Really? My dad hired you?

SARAH – Who knows-- maybe he didn’t notice the boobs, thought I was a boy. (beat) Wow. I just said that. Sorry, Rose.

ROSE – Oh, Dominic noticed the boobs all right, he just ignored them. But good tomato pie he couldn’t ignore and you got him with that.

Nick realizes he’s still shaking Sarah’s hand. He stops.

NICK – Um... well... thanks for making the pizzas today... and, uh, everyday.

Sarah smiles.

SARAH – Right. See you around.

She moves on down the line to Nick’s sisters. Nick shakes himself back to reality, Rose looking at him.

NICK – What.

Rose smirks and greets the next visitor. Nick glances at Sarah again and then sees Dream, off talking to people, telling stories, twirling around for some reason.

### The Second "Meet-Cute" Iteration:

SOME CONTEXT: MORNING AFTER NICK HAS RETURNED HOME FROM SAN FRANCISCO... TODAY IS THE FUNERAL...

INT. BERRA HOME - NICK'S BEDROOM - DAY

Morning. Sun peeking in through the curtains.

Nick, on the top bunk, stirs awake.

CLATTERING and SIZZLING can be heard coming from the kitchen downstairs.

Nick lifts himself up, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He stretches with a GROAN. Peeks over the bed at Dream on the bottom bunk-- fast asleep.

INT. BERRA HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Rose is in the kitchen, frying bacon, stirring some egg yolks. The smoke from the pan clouds the room.

Nick enters.

NICK Smells good.

ROSE Look at you, up early.

NICK What're you making?

ROSE Bacon and pancakes. Dad's favorite.

Nick nods.

ROSE (CONT'D) Figured today would be a good day for it.

She goes to the refrigerator.

ROSE (CONT'D) Shit.

She picks up the gallon of milk-- barely anything left.

ROSE (CONT'D) I coulda sworn we had milk.

NICK I'll just go run and pick some up.

ROSE Nobody's open yet. I'll tell you what--

She goes to the key hook on the wall, takes a set down. She hands them to Nick.

ROSE (CONT'D) Head over to the pizzeria. In the fridge, there'll be milk. Pick that up. While you're at it, bring home some salami. And pepperoni. They'll be in the freezer.

NICK Jeez, ma. Should I make a list?

ROSE Ha ha. You're funny.

Nick goes to leave. Turns back.

NICK Dream's still sleeping. But if she wakes up and Juliet wakes up... you know...

ROSE What?

NICK Just make sure Juliet's nice?

ROSE I'll try my best. But she's a Berrawoman, so... you know.

NICK Yeah. Unfortunately.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - DAY

Nick unlocks the door and lets himself in.

His feet seem tentative about stepping any further inside. He looks around, taking it in.

It's a decent sized place, not too big, not too small. The fanciest thing about it might be the red and white table cloths on the booth tables peppered around the main floor.

On the walls, framed pictures of Italians and family. A dusty and sun-faded banner with the New York Yankees logo.

Nick gives a quick glance at the photos of his much younger

self on the wall but keeps on walking.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - KITCHEN - DAY

Nick notes some dough balls underneath a towel, resting on the counter.

He goes through the refrigerator, finds the milk. Heads toward the freezer. Not sure how to get it open.

Finally figures it out.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - FREEZER - DAY

Nick heads inside the freezer, searching for the pepperoni and sausage. Behind him, the door begins to slowly close.

A CLANG and a sudden lack of light.

NICK Shit.

Nick tries to reopen the door-- no luck. Shit, indeed. Nick starts to bang the side of his body against the door.

NICK (CONT'D) Come on, man.

The door's not budging.

NICK (CONT'D) God damn pepperoni.

Now he starts to kick the door... Might as well try.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - DAY

Unlocking the already unlocked door and letting herself inside is SARAH OBERST (22). Her dirty blonde hair is pulled up and her presence means business.

She notices that the door was already unlocked. Furrows her brow and looks around...

Then she hears--

BANG. BANG. THUD.

NICK (O.S.) (muffled)

Shit, shit, shit!

SARAH What the hell...

She slowly moves towards the kitchen, the clear source of the noise.

She makes a pit-stop at the counter holding the register. Removes a Louisville Slugger from underneath. Grips it tightly.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - KITCHEN - DAY Sarah stands in front of the freezer door, bat in the air.

SARAH Who is that?

NICK (O.S.) Huh? Is someone there? The door closed on me--

SARAH Who the hell are you?

NICK (O.S.) What? Can you open the door?

SARAH What do you want?

NICK (O.S.) Uh... for you to open was in here trying to sausage and pepperoni

closed on me--

SARAH Who the hell tries to rob a pizzaplace?

NICK (O.S.) Wait, what?

SARAH Why should I open the door? I

should keep you locked in there until the police get here--

NICK (O.S.) You called the cops?

Sarah hesitates, thinking.

SARAH Yeah! I did! They're on their way.

(beat) And they're mad.

She rolls her eyes at herself-- "They're mad?" Really?

NICK (O.S.) Look, this is all just a big

misunderstanding... My mom told me to take some sausage--

SARAH You're mother robs pizzerias with  
you? What are you guys, like a team?

NICK (O.S.) Look, I don't know who you are, or  
how you got in here, but my mom is Rose. I'm Nick.  
Sarah puts the pieces together.

SARAH Nick Berra? San Francisco-Nick?

NICK (O.S.) Uh... sure. Yeah.

Sarah goes to open the door, one hand still gripped tightly  
on the Louisville Slugger.

She swings the door open and lifts the bat in the air as  
Nick steps out--

He instinctively ducks, though Sarah hasn't swung.

NICK (CONT'D)

Jesus! He straightens up when he sees that she's not going  
to swing.

NICK (CONT'D) You come prepared...

SARAH You don't look like Dominic's son.

NICK Uh. What should Dominic's son look like?

SARAH The photos on the wall--

NICK I've changed a bit in the, uh, ten years since those  
were taken...

SARAH The hair...

NICK Yeah. The hair... Who are you?

He glances shiftily at the bat in her hand. She notices. She  
leans it against the wall.

SARAH I'm Sarah.

NICK Sarah.



SARAH I make the pizzas here.

Nick takes a moment to let that sink in.

NICK Really? My dad hired you?

SARAH You're surprised.

NICK I mean...

SARAH Because of the whole me not having  
a penis, right?

NICK Uh. I-- I mean... that's usually  
the case with who my dad hires, not that I agree--

SARAH In his defense, I did wear a short  
wig and dressed like a guy when I applied for the job.

Nick stares. That was a joke.

He laughs.

NICK Yeah. I knew that.

Sarah walks out of the kitchen...

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - DAY

And into the main part of the restaurant. She grabs an apron  
off of a hanger. Ties it around her waist.

Nick has followed her.

NICK So what are you doing here so  
early?

SARAH Getting a head start on the food  
for the funeral reception.

NICK Oh, right. How'd you know I lived  
in San Francisco?

SARAH (duh)

I'm surrounded by your mom almost everyday. She talks about you.

NICK Did my dad?

Sarah doesn't say anything, walks back into the kitchen.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - KITCHEN - DAY

Sarah has taken the towel off of the dough balls and starts to feel their readiness.

Nick once again has followed her.

NICK So, yeah... I wasn't trying to rob the place of sausage or anything.

SARAH (CONT'D)

SARAH Yeah, I know. We established that like a minute ago, remember?

NICK Right. My mom. She asked me to pick the stuff up. She looks at him. Laughs at his awkwardness.

SARAH Okay. Got it.

NICK Yeah. So, I guess I'll see you later today. She gives him a distracted smile.

SARAH I'll be here.

Nick lifts up the sausage log in his hand and gives it an awkward wave.

Sarah starts to toss the dough as Nick heads out of the kitchen.

## Appendix E – The Third “Meet Cute” Iteration

EXT. BERRA HOME – DAY

The BRIDESMAIDS and Sofia all stand around the front lawn, talking and laughing. The bridesmaids wear matching lavender dresses.

Nick approaches, Sofia spotting him. She runs over.

SOFIA  
Yay! They’re ready! Thanks, Nicky.

NICK  
Didn’t really have anything to do with them—

SOFIA  
Can I take a look at them?

She shuffles through Nick’s arms, inspecting each bouquet.

SOFIA (CONT’D)  
Oh, no.

NICK  
What?

SOFIA  
Sarah’s is missing!

NICK  
Sofe, this is what mom gave me, so...

The Bridesmaids come closer to Nick, curious. Sofia turns to them, looking for Sarah.

SOFIA  
Sarah, we’ve got a problem.

SARAH OBERST (22) steps closer, away from the pack. But she wasn’t really blending in anyway-- Sure, she’s got the lavender dress on, but there’s something about her presence that sets her apart. She means business.

SOFIA (CONT’D)  
Nick lost your bouquet.

NICK  
What? Sofe, I didn't do anything.

SARAH  
You did it on purpose, didn't you?

NICK  
What? No!

SARAH  
Relax. I'm joking.

NICK  
Oh. Not really feeling jokes right now—

SARAH  
Aren't you just a ball of sunshine.

Nick gives her a look.

NICK  
I'm just trying to keep it mellow—

Sarah smiles, instigating.

SARAH  
Totally dude. Mellow.

NICK  
I feel like you're coming at me and I don't even know you—

SOFIA  
Nick, you know Sarah.

SARAH  
All the times you ripped the heads off my Barbie dolls and you don't even remember me?  
I'm disappointed.

Nick stares, thinking. He takes Sarah in, recognition washing over. Putting the pieces together—

NICK  
Sarah Sarah. Who came over all the time. And played Barbies and shit.

Nick takes Sarah in again. Longer this time.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Sorry. You just, uh...

SARAH  
Grew up? Yeah. Had to happen eventually.

NICK  
Yeah...

SARAH  
Looks like we've both changed a bit...

She smiles at him as he continues to stare, mouth open a bit, thinking of what to say. He starts to speak when—

A hairy arm wraps around him from behind. PETEY PITONIAK (25) and VINCE (25) start to push Nick good-naturedly.

## Appendix F – Two Different Endings

### First Draft Ending

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA – DAY

Nick walks inside.

NICK  
All right. Now I'm ready—

He stops short.

There's Sarah, standing there, light from the window falling on her. The family is quiet, watching. Entertained.

Nick doesn't see them. He only sees Sarah.

They approach each other.

SARAH  
So. I was thinking... I want to eat eclairs with you, too.

Nick smiles.

Sarah glances at the pizza pies on the table.

SARAH (CONT'D)  
You finally made some pizza.

NICK  
Verdict?

SARAH  
Haven't tried it yet.

NICK  
You should.

SARAH  
Yeah, but I kind of want to kiss you and I don't want to taste like garlic.

Nick lifts an eyebrow.

NICK  
Fair enough.

And they kiss. And continue to kiss.

The family CHEERS obnoxiously, messing with Nick. While kissing, Nick grabs a slice of pizza and lifts it up to their mouths.

NICK (CONT'D)  
I haven't tried it yet either. Together?

Sarah takes a bite, then Nick.

Sarah takes a moment, savoring it... Then waves her hand in a playful "so-so" gesture. Nick laughs.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Oh, thanks.

She kisses him.

NICK (CONT'D)  
Ah, you taste like garlic!

SARAH  
(laughing)  
Shut up!

Nick kisses her again.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - NIGHT (MONTH OR SO LATER)

It's a full house. People are in for take-out, people are in for sit down. Regulars, teens, kids, families.

On the wall, next to the Yankees banner-- a Rolling Stones tongue banner. Next to the framed photos-- a poster for Cream.

INT. DOMINIC'S PIZZA - KITCHEN – NIGHT

Two discs of dough fly in the air.

They come back down-- one caught by Sarah, the other by Nick.

They toss the dough into the air again.

Together.

THE END.

Second Draft Ending

EXT. SARAH'S HOUSE – DAY

Sarah hugs Bob; hugs Muriel who has ventured outside. They kiss her. Everyone holds back the tears.

BOB

Call us when you get in.

On her own now, she packs the last of her things up in the trunk of her car. Closes the trunk.

In the driver's seat she backs out of the driveway. Starts to make her way down the road when--

SCREECH. She hits the brakes-- Nick has popped out in front of her, hand outstretched. She stares at him, heart racing.

SARAH

Idiot! I could've killed you!

NICK

Please. You were going like five miles an hour.

SARAH

Maybe I should've killed you.

NICK

Ouch.

He makes his way over to her open window. Leans against it.

SARAH

What're you doing?

NICK

Coming to see you.

SARAH

I'm kind of... busy.

NICK



I see that. How long's the drive?

SARAH

About an hour and a half. Look, I want to get on the road, what--

NICK

Want some company?

SARAH

Huh?

NICK

Do you want some company?

She stares at him. Wanting to believe him, but wary...

SARAH

What about San Francisco...?

NICK

I need a change of scenery.

A huge smile grows across Sarah's face. Nick matches it. He takes that as a sign to get in. He hurries over—

INT. SARAH'S CAR – DAY

And hops inside, looking around.

NICK

What kind of snacks did you bring?

She pulls him closer and kisses him, hard. He smiles.  
Brings her closer to keep kissing.

SARAH

Okay, I gotta drive now.

NICK

You can multi-task.

He keeps kissing her as she laughs.

EXT. ROAD – DAY

Finally, the car starts to drive away, off into the distance.

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